The Great Redundancy: The Withering Away of the Proletariat and the Coming Egalitarianism of Elites

Why Marx Was Right About Everything Except Who Disappears

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ABSTRACT

Karl Marx predicted that the contradictions of capitalism would produce revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and ultimately the withering away of the state. He was correct about the contradictions. He was wrong about the resolution. This paper argues that the historical trajectory points not toward the elimination of the ruling class but toward the elimination of the ruled class—that the proletariat, not the state, will wither away. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks developed in this series—the architecture of domination (containment, metabolic dependency, and belief infrastructure), Elite Darwinism (competitive selection for strategic operators), and the conquest of freedom (five millennia of systematic elimination of autonomous lifeways)—this paper demonstrates that the underclass has never existed as an end in itself but only as a *necessary input* for elite projects requiring mass labor and mass military service. When technological development (robotics, artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons systems) eliminates the need for those inputs, the structural logic that has governed elite-underclass relations for five thousand years predicts not liberation but liquidation—not through dramatic genocide but through the quiet withdrawal of the life-support systems on which metabolically dependent populations rely. The paper further argues that elite populations have always maintained relatively egalitarian, rights-based relations *among themselves*, and that the legal instruments celebrated as universal human achievements—the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, the United States Constitution—were produced by elites to constrain other elites, not to protect common people. The endpoint is what Jefferson explicitly admired in the American South and what the Spartans achieved in practice: a society of equals supported entirely by non-human labor, in which the "civilized" relations that elites have always practiced among themselves become the universal condition—because no one else remains.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE WRONG WITHERING

Marx's Prediction

In 1875, Karl Marx articulated his vision of historical trajectory. The contradictions of capitalism would intensify. The proletariat, immiserated beyond endurance, would achieve class consciousness. Revolution would transfer the means of production to the workers. The state—which Marx understood as an instrument of class domination—would gradually become unnecessary as class distinctions dissolved. The state would wither away.

The prediction rested on a critical assumption: that the ruling class needed the working class. Capital required labor. Factories required workers. Armies required soldiers. The bourgeoisie could exploit the proletariat, but they could not eliminate them without destroying the system that generated their wealth. This mutual dependency—however asymmetric—gave the working class structural leverage. They could withdraw their labor. They could refuse to fight. They could, in sufficient numbers and with sufficient organization, force concessions or seize power entirely.

For two centuries, this assumption held. The industrial economy required human bodies in factories, mines, and fields. National defense required human bodies in trenches, tanks, and cockpits. Mass consumption required human purchasing power to absorb mass production. The underclass was exploited, degraded, and brutalized—but it was *needed*. And because it was needed, it possessed bargaining power, however constrained.

This paper argues that the assumption is failing. Technological development is progressively eliminating the need for mass human labor, mass human military service, and mass human consumption. When this process completes, the structural logic that has governed human civilization for five millennia predicts an outcome Marx never considered: not the liberation of the working class but its redundancy. Not the withering of the state but the withering of the people the state was built to extract from.

The Framework

This argument draws on and synthesizes the theoretical frameworks developed across this series:

The Architecture of Domination established that coercive states rest on three interlocking systems—physical containment (barriers preventing flight from extraction), metabolic dependency (population growth beyond natural carrying capacity creating biological lock-in), and belief infrastructure (information asymmetry generating voluntary compliance). These systems co-evolve and mutually reinforce, producing populations that cannot leave, cannot survive independently, and accept their subordination as natural.

Belief as Infrastructure demonstrated that elite domination depends on claims to privileged knowledge that populations cannot verify—and that these claims appear through convergent evolution across isolated civilizations because they solve the universal problem of extracting surplus from larger populations without proportional coercion.

The Conquest of Freedom traced how agricultural states systematically eliminated autonomous human lifeways over five millennia, celebrated that elimination as heroic progress, and deployed identical mechanisms from Bronze Age Greece to colonial America. By 1900, virtually no human population remained outside state systems of extraction.

Elite Darwinism explained why positions of authority are systematically captured by strategic operators regardless of the original purpose of institutions—and why liberation movements reliably transform into new systems of control.

These frameworks describe the *mechanisms* of domination. This paper addresses the *trajectory*—where the mechanisms lead when the material conditions that created them undergo fundamental change.

The Central Argument

The argument proceeds in five steps:

First, the underclass exists not as a natural social category but as a *necessary input*—populations maintained because their labor, military service, and consumption are required for elite projects.

Second, elites have always maintained relatively egalitarian, rights-based relations *among themselves*, and the legal instruments we celebrate as civilizational achievements were created to govern intra-elite relations, not to protect common people.

Third, technology is severing the three dependencies (labor, military, consumption) that made the underclass necessary.

Fourth, historical precedent demonstrates that when elites no longer need a population, they do not adapt to keep that population around—they discard it.

Fifth, the endpoint is not dystopia for the survivors but something resembling utopia: a society of technological equals practicing the civilized, rights-based governance that elites have always practiced among themselves—supported not by human slaves but by machines.

II. THE UNDERCLASS AS INPUT: WHY THEY WERE KEPT ALIVE

The Metabolic Trap Revisited

The Architecture of Domination established that once contained populations expand beyond natural carrying capacity and lose the skills for autonomous subsistence, they become biologically dependent on the hierarchical systems that extract from them. The metabolic trap closes. The population cannot leave, cannot resist effectively, and cannot survive without the artificial life-support system that the state provides and controls.

But the analysis must be extended in a direction that paper did not fully explore: the trap is mutual. Yes, the underclass depends on the elite-controlled system for survival. But the elite equally depends on the underclass for the inputs that make elite existence possible.

Consider the material reality of any pre-industrial state. The pharaoh needs someone to build the pyramids. The Roman senator needs someone to farm the latifundia. The medieval lord needs someone to plow the fields and someone to hold the spears. The factory owner needs someone to operate the machines. The general needs someone to fill the ranks.

The underclass is not maintained out of benevolence, moral obligation, or even indifference. The underclass is maintained because it is *useful*. It represents the necessary human energy input into systems of elite wealth and power. Remove the underclass and the pyramids don't get built, the fields don't get plowed, the factories don't run, the armies don't march.

This is the insight Marx grasped but drew the wrong conclusion from. He saw mutual dependency and predicted that the dependent class with numerical superiority would eventually assert itself. He did not consider what would happen when the dependency became one-directional—when the elite no longer needed the mass of humanity for anything at all.

Three Dependencies

The underclass has historically provided three essential services to the elite. Each represents a dependency that gave common people structural relevance, however exploited their position:

Labor: The most fundamental dependency. Agricultural surplus requires agricultural laborers. Industrial production requires industrial workers. Construction requires builders. Every material achievement of civilization rests on the physical labor of masses of human beings whose work produces the surplus that elites extract and enjoy.

Military service: States compete with other states. Competition requires armies. Armies require bodies. From the Bronze Age through the twentieth century, the primary military resource was the human soldier—the peasant conscript, the citizen soldier, the drafted infantryman. Elites could command but could not personally fill the ranks. They needed the underclass to fight and die in numbers sufficient to defend or expand elite territory.

Consumption: In the industrial and post-industrial economy, a third dependency emerged. Mass production requires mass consumption. Henry Ford understood this when he paid workers

five dollars per day—not from generosity but because workers who could afford cars created the market that made Ford rich. The mass consumer economy requires a mass of consumers with purchasing power.

These three dependencies constituted the structural leverage of the working class. If workers stopped working, production halted. If soldiers refused to fight, borders collapsed. If consumers stopped buying, profits disappeared. This leverage—not moral argument, not political organizing, not revolutionary theory—is what forced concessions from elites throughout modern history. The eight-hour day, workplace safety regulations, social insurance, minimum wages, voting rights: each was conceded because the population that demanded it was *needed* and therefore possessed the capacity to withhold what was needed.

The question this paper poses: What happens when all three dependencies are severed?

III. THE EGALITARIANISM OF ELITES: LEGAL PROTECTIONS AS INTRA-ELITE AGREEMENTS

The Magna Carta Myth

The standard narrative presents the Magna Carta (1215) as a foundational document of universal human rights—the beginning of the long arc toward individual liberty and democratic governance. School curricula across the English-speaking world teach it as the moment when "the people" began constraining arbitrary royal power.

The reality is that the Magna Carta was a document produced by feudal barons—the wealthiest and most powerful men in England below the king himself—to protect *their* privileges from royal overreach. It was an intra-elite negotiation. The barons who forced King John's hand at Runnymede were not champions of the common peasant. They were landholders, military commanders, and regional powers who objected to the crown extracting from *them* without consent.

Consider the document's provisions. Clause 1 confirms the liberties of the English Church—protecting the institutional interests of the ecclesiastical elite. Clause 2 addresses relief payments owed by earls, barons, and knights upon inheriting estates—an exclusively elite concern. Clause 12 establishes that no scutage (military tax) shall be imposed without the common counsel of the kingdom—meaning the consent of the barons, not of the peasantry. Clause 39, the famous provision that "no free man shall be seized, imprisoned, dispossessed, outlawed, or exiled... except by the lawful judgment of his peers," applied to *free men*—a category that excluded the vast majority of England's population, who were villeins (serfs) bound to their lords' estates.

The Magna Carta did not protect the English people from tyranny. It protected the English *elite* from their *king*. The serfs who worked the barons' fields received nothing from Runnymede. Their position—metabolically trapped, physically contained, ideologically managed—remained unchanged.

The English Bill of Rights

The English Bill of Rights (1689) followed the same pattern. Produced in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution—in which Parliament (composed of landed gentry and aristocrats) replaced one king with another more amenable to parliamentary authority—the document established rights for Parliament against the crown. It prohibited royal interference with parliamentary elections, royal taxation without parliamentary consent, and maintenance of standing armies without parliamentary approval.

"Parliament" meant the propertied classes. The House of Lords was hereditary aristocracy. The House of Commons was elected by a tiny fraction of the population meeting property qualifications. The "rights" established in 1689 were rights of wealthy property owners to govern without royal interference. The agricultural laborers, urban poor, and working classes whose labor generated the wealth that made parliamentary governance possible were not participants in the arrangement.

The United States Constitution

The American Constitution (1787) represents perhaps the most sophisticated example of intra-elite agreement in human history—and the most thoroughly mythologized as a universal rights document.

The Constitutional Convention was composed of the wealthiest men in the American colonies. Of the fifty-five delegates, the majority were lawyers, planters, merchants, or financiers. Many were slaveholders. They gathered not to establish rights for "the people" but to create a governmental framework that would protect property, facilitate commerce, and prevent the kind of popular democratic movements (such as Shays' Rebellion) that threatened elite economic interests.

The Constitution's original text did not include a Bill of Rights—that was added later, under pressure, as the first ten amendments. The document itself established a government in which the president was chosen by an Electoral College (insulating selection from direct popular vote), senators were appointed by state legislatures (not elected by the people until the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913), the Supreme Court was appointed for life (entirely removed from popular accountability), and voting rights were left to the states, which universally restricted suffrage by property, race, and sex.

The Constitution protected property (including enslaved human beings as property). It facilitated interstate commerce. It created mechanisms for suppressing domestic insurrection. It established a framework in which the colonial elite—having thrown off the British crown—could

govern amongst themselves without interference from either a monarch above or a populace below.

James Madison, the Constitution's principal architect, was explicit about the purpose. In Federalist No. 10, he argued that the primary function of government was to protect the "diversity in the faculties of men, from which the rights of property originate." The greatest threat he identified was "a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project"—that is, the threat that common people might use democratic mechanisms to redistribute elite wealth.

The Constitution was a peace treaty among elites. It established rules by which the wealthy would govern, compete, and resolve disputes without destroying each other—and without allowing the laboring majority to interfere with property arrangements.

The Pattern: Elites Protect Themselves From Elites

The pattern extends far beyond these three famous documents:

The Roman Republic's constitutional arrangements—the Senate, the consuls, the tribunes—were mechanisms by which the patrician and later senatorial classes governed their mutual relations. The *mos maiorum* (ancestral custom) that constrained Roman political behavior was an elite code governing elite conduct.

The Peace of Westphalia (1648) established the modern state system—an agreement among European sovereigns (elites) about how they would relate to each other, recognizing territorial sovereignty and non-interference. Common populations were not consulted about whether they wished to be governed by the particular sovereign whose territory they occupied.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was drafted by an international committee of diplomats, lawyers, and intellectuals—elites representing states—establishing principles that states would ostensibly apply to their populations. Its enforcement depends entirely on whether states (controlled by elites) choose to comply.

In every case, the celebrated documents of "civilization" and "rights" were produced by elites, for elites, to regulate intra-elite relations. When their protections trickled down to common people, it was because the common people were *needed* and could exert enough pressure through strikes, protests, or threatened withdrawal of labor and military service to force extension of elite agreements to cover the non-elite.

The Civilized Relations Among Equals

This analysis reveals something the standard narrative obscures: elites have *always* maintained relatively egalitarian, rights-based, "civilized" relations among themselves. The brutality of human civilization has been directed overwhelmingly downward—from elite to underclass—and

outward—from one civilization's elite against another civilization's population. Among peers, the historical record shows something quite different.

The Spartan *homoioi*—"the Equals"—practiced radical egalitarianism within the citizen body. Land was distributed equally. Meals were taken communally. Wealth display was discouraged. Collective decision-making governed the polis. Among the Spartan citizens, relations were more egalitarian than in any modern democracy.

The catch, of course, was the Helots—the enslaved population of Messenia who outnumbered the Spartans roughly seven to one and whose agricultural labor supported the entire system. Spartan egalitarianism was possible precisely because the productive labor was performed by others. The citizens could be equals because they were collectively masters.

Thomas Jefferson recognized this model and admired it. He described the plantation South as resembling a "Christian Sparta"—a society of gentlemen-equals whose egalitarian relations and civic virtue were supported by enslaved labor. Jefferson was not being ironic. He genuinely saw the Southern slaveholding class as practicing the kind of republican self-governance that Athens and Sparta had pioneered—a democracy of masters.

The Athenian demokratia operated on the same principle. Citizens debated as equals in the Assembly, served on juries, held office by lot. The democracy was genuine—for citizens. Citizens were approximately 10-15% of the population. The remainder—women, metics (resident foreigners), and the enslaved—performed the labor that freed citizens for politics, philosophy, and war.

The Roman senatorial class, for all its fierce internal competition, operated within a framework of law, custom, and mutual respect that made the Senate function for centuries as a deliberative body of relative equals. Roman law—celebrated as one of civilization's great achievements—was developed by and for the propertied classes. Its protections applied most fully to those with the status and resources to invoke them.

The pattern is consistent: within elite circles, relations tend toward mutual recognition, rights-based governance, rule of law, and something approaching genuine equality. The violence, extraction, and domination that characterize civilization are directed at the underclass that supports elite existence, not at fellow elites (except during moments of intra-elite conflict over who controls the system).

This distinction is essential for understanding the trajectory. The question is not whether elites are capable of civilized, egalitarian self-governance. They demonstrably are—they have practiced it for millennia, among themselves. The question is what happens when the underclass whose labor supported that arrangement is no longer necessary.

IV. THE THREE DECOUPLINGS

Decoupling One: Labor

The first and most fundamental dependency—the need for mass human labor—is being severed by automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence.

The process began with the Industrial Revolution, when machines replaced human muscle in specific tasks: spinning, weaving, pumping, hauling. But early industrial machines required human operators—someone to feed the cotton gin, tend the power loom, shovel coal into the furnace. The machine replaced *some* human effort while creating demand for *different* human effort. Total employment shifted sectors but did not decline.

The current technological revolution is qualitatively different. Artificial intelligence and advanced robotics are replacing not merely human muscle but human *cognition*—the capacity to perceive, decide, and act that previously required a human mind. When a machine can drive a truck, diagnose a disease, write a legal brief, manage a warehouse, trade securities, and design a building, the range of tasks requiring human labor narrows to a vanishing point.

The standard reassurance—"technology always creates new jobs to replace old ones"—relies on historical precedent that may no longer apply. Previous technological revolutions automated *physical* tasks while creating demand for *cognitive* tasks. Workers displaced from fields moved to factories; workers displaced from factories moved to offices. Each transition moved humans up the capability ladder toward tasks machines could not perform.

But artificial intelligence attacks the top of the ladder. When machines can perform cognitive tasks—analysis, creativity, communication, judgment—there is no higher rung for displaced workers to climb. The truck driver replaced by autonomous vehicles cannot "move up" to knowledge work if knowledge work is also being automated.

The economic data already reflects this trajectory. Labor's share of national income has declined steadily across developed economies since the 1980s. Capital's share has risen correspondingly. Productivity has grown while median wages have stagnated. The gains from technological advancement are flowing to capital owners—the elite—not to labor. The decoupling is underway.

Decoupling Two: Military Service

The second dependency—the need for mass human military service—is being severed by autonomous weapons systems, precision-guided munitions, drone warfare, and professional military forces.

The citizen-soldier model that dominated warfare from the Napoleonic era through the twentieth century required mass armies. National defense meant national mobilization. Millions of young men—overwhelmingly from the working and lower-middle classes—were conscripted, trained, and deployed. Their willingness to fight (or their inability to refuse) was a critical national resource. In exchange for military service, populations extracted concessions: voting rights

expanded after mass mobilization in World War I; the GI Bill and welfare state programs followed World War II.

This model is obsolete. Modern military operations are conducted by small professional forces equipped with technology that multiplies their effectiveness far beyond what mass armies achieved. A single drone operator can deliver more precision firepower than a battalion of infantry. A cyber warfare unit of fifty specialists can disable an adversary's infrastructure more effectively than a hundred thousand soldiers.

The United States—the most militarily powerful nation in history—eliminated conscription in 1973 and has fought every subsequent conflict with an all-volunteer professional force representing less than 1% of the population. The military has become a specialized institution, not a mass undertaking. The strategic calculus no longer requires the majority population's participation or consent.

Autonomous weapons systems accelerate this decoupling. When drones, robots, and AI-directed systems can conduct military operations without human soldiers, the final dependency connecting national defense to the civilian population dissolves. An elite need not ask a population's sons and daughters to fight and die. The machines will fight. The population's military contribution becomes as unnecessary as its agricultural labor became after mechanization.

Decoupling Three: Consumption

The third dependency—the need for mass consumer purchasing power—is being severed by the financialization of the economy and the construction of closed-loop elite wealth circuits.

Henry Ford's insight in 1914 was that workers needed sufficient wages to purchase the products they manufactured. Mass production required mass consumption. This created structural incentive for elites to maintain a degree of working-class prosperity: impoverished workers could not buy cars, refrigerators, or houses, and without buyers, factories had no customers.

The contemporary economy operates differently. Elite wealth increasingly derives not from selling products to mass consumers but from asset appreciation—the rising value of stocks, real estate, private equity, and financial instruments traded among the wealthy themselves. The S&P 500's value is driven by institutional investors, sovereign wealth funds, and the wealthiest individuals, not by working-class purchasing power. Real estate in global cities appreciates because wealthy buyers bid against each other, not because average families can afford the properties.

The luxury economy further illustrates the decoupling. The fastest-growing market segments are ultra-luxury goods and services—products priced beyond the reach of ordinary consumers and marketed exclusively to the wealthy. A company selling ten-thousand-dollar handbags or hundred-million-dollar yachts does not need a middle class.

The digital economy accelerates this pattern. Tech companies generate revenue through advertising (selling attention harvested from users, not products sold to consumers), subscription services (extracting recurring payments from those who can afford them), and data monetization (converting surveillance into value without requiring consumer purchasing). The user is not the customer; the user is the product.

When elite wealth no longer depends on mass consumer purchasing power, the final economic rationale for maintaining working-class prosperity disappears.

V. HISTORICAL PRECEDENT: WHAT ELITES DO WITH UNNECESSARY POPULATIONS

The English Enclosures

The English Enclosure Acts of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries provide the clearest historical precedent for what happens when a population transitions from necessary input to unnecessary liability.

For centuries, the English peasantry was essential. Lords needed tenants to farm their estates, producing the grain that fed households and generated revenue. The manorial system was exploitative—peasants surrendered substantial portions of their produce as rent and obligation—but the exploitation was predicated on *need*. Without peasants working the land, the lord's estate was worthless.

The wool trade changed the equation. As wool prices rose, sheep became more profitable than grain. Crucially, sheep required far less human labor than arable farming. A few shepherds could tend flocks on land that had previously required dozens of farming families. The peasantry was transitioning from essential labor input to obstacle—human beings occupying land that could be more profitably used for sheep.

The elite response was not to retrain the peasants, find them alternative employment, or share the wool profits. The response was enclosure: the legal transformation of common lands—on which peasants had subsisted for generations—into private property from which they were expelled. Parliament, controlled by the landowning class, passed the Enclosure Acts. The law—that instrument of intra-elite agreement—was deployed to liquidate a population that had become unnecessary.

Thomas More described the result in 1516: "Your sheep that were wont to be so meek and tame, and so small eaters, now, as I hear say, be become so great devourers and so wild, that they eat up, and swallow down the very men themselves." Sheep ate men. The displaced peasantry flooded into cities, creating the urban proletariat that would staff the Industrial Revolution—useful again, temporarily, in a new capacity.

The critical lesson: the English elite did not attempt to preserve the peasantry when its labor became unnecessary. They did not create social programs, transitional support, or alternative livelihoods. They passed laws expelling peasants from the land, and if the displaced starved, emigrated, or died in urban slums, that was not the elite's concern. The population was no longer a necessary input. It became a liability to be cleared.

The Highland Clearances

The Scottish Highland Clearances (1750s-1880s) replicated the pattern with even greater brutality. Scottish clan chiefs, transformed into commercial landlords, discovered that sheep farming was more profitable than the subsistence agriculture practiced by their Highland tenants. The solution was eviction—burning homes, destroying crops, and forcing populations off land their families had occupied for centuries.

The displaced Highlanders were shipped to coastal settlements, emigrated to the colonies, or died. The chiefs who had once depended on large clan populations for military strength no longer needed warriors. Professional armies had replaced clan levies. The military dependency that had once given common Highlanders structural value had been severed. What remained was a commercial calculus in which people were less profitable than sheep.

The Destruction of the Buffalo

As documented in *The Architecture of Domination*, the deliberate destruction of the American bison herds in the 1870s-1880s represents the most explicit case of eliminating a population's subsistence base to force submission. American military and civilian leaders understood that the Plains Indians' autonomous existence depended on the buffalo. Rather than fight expensive military campaigns against mobile populations, they destroyed the food supply.

General Philip Sheridan reportedly argued to the Texas legislature that buffalo hunters "have done more to settle the vexed Indian question than the entire regular army has done in the last thirty years. They are destroying the Indians' commissary... For a lasting peace, let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffaloes are exterminated."

The strategy was the deliberate creation of metabolic dependency—forcing autonomous populations into the reservation system where they would become dependent on government rations. The population was not needed as labor (settlers were arriving). It was not needed for military service (the US Army was professional). It occupied land that elites wanted. The solution was to destroy its capacity for independent existence.

The Pattern

The historical pattern is consistent: when elites no longer need a population's labor or military service, they do not maintain that population out of moral obligation. They restructure arrangements to serve elite interests, and if restructuring means displacement, impoverishment, or death for the unnecessary population, that is an acceptable cost.

The English did not try to find new uses for peasants. They enclosed the commons and let them disperse. The Scottish chiefs did not retrain Highlanders for new economic roles. They burned their homes and shipped in sheep. American military planners did not negotiate coexistence with Plains Indians. They destroyed the buffalo and starved them onto reservations.

In each case, the unnecessary population was not violently massacred in a single dramatic event. It was subjected to what might be called *structural liquidation*—the systematic removal of the conditions necessary for its continued existence. The laws changed. The commons were enclosed. The food supply was destroyed. The infrastructure of independent life was dismantled. The population didn't need to be killed; it only needed to be made unable to sustain itself.

VI. THE SILENT ENCLOSURE: HOW REDUNDANCY PROCEEDS

Not Genocide But Phase-Out

The elimination of a redundant underclass will not—and need not—resemble historical genocide. The Enclosures in England were not a war; they were a zoning change. The mechanism is structural, not violent. It operates through the withdrawal of support rather than the application of force.

Consider the mechanisms already visible:

Falling birth rates among the working class. When the cost of raising children exceeds what working-class families can sustain—when housing is unaffordable, childcare is unavailable, education is expensive, and economic prospects are dim—birth rates decline. This is not policy imposed from above (though it can be facilitated by policy choices). It is the natural demographic response to economic conditions that make reproduction irrational for the non-wealthy. Across developed nations, fertility rates have fallen below replacement level. The populations declining fastest are those without wealth.

Rising mortality among the economically marginalized. In the United States, life expectancy for the poorest quintile has stagnated or declined while life expectancy for the wealthiest has continued to increase. The opioid epidemic, which has killed over a million Americans since 1999, has overwhelmingly affected working-class communities. "Deaths of despair"—suicide, drug overdose, alcoholic liver disease—are concentrated among populations whose economic function has eroded. These deaths are not deliberately engineered. They are the consequences of structural conditions that make life unsustainable for populations the economy no longer needs.

Withdrawal of public infrastructure. Rural hospitals close. Public transit deteriorates. Schools in poor districts lose funding. Water systems in post-industrial cities go unrepaired. The infrastructure that sustains non-elite populations is allowed to decay—not through active destruction but through the reallocation of resources toward areas where economically productive (i.e., elite-serving) populations reside. The result is identical to active destruction: populations dependent on public infrastructure find that infrastructure disappearing.

Incarceration as containment. The United States incarcerates more people than any nation in history—overwhelmingly from the working class and communities of color. Mass incarceration removes economically redundant populations from public spaces, strips them of political rights (felon disenfranchisement), and confines them in institutions that function as warehouses for the unnecessary. The prison does not rehabilitate or reintegrate; it contains.

The retreat to "smart cities." Elite populations increasingly concentrate in technologically sophisticated urban centers—what might be called the new castles. These cities offer advanced infrastructure, efficient services, extensive amenities, and high security. They are expensive by design: the cost of entry filters out unnecessary populations. The elite does not build a wall around the smart city. The price tag is the wall.

The New Enclosure

The contemporary process mirrors the historical enclosures with remarkable precision. In sixteenth-century England, the commons—shared land on which the peasantry subsisted—was enclosed, privatized, and repurposed for elite benefit. The peasants were not killed; they were simply denied access to the resources they needed to live.

In the twenty-first century, the commons being enclosed are not physical fields but the systems that sustain modern life: affordable housing (enclosed by financialized real estate markets that treat shelter as an asset class), healthcare (enclosed by a system that ties coverage to employment as employment disappears), education (enclosed by costs that make meaningful credentials available primarily to the wealthy), the digital commons (enclosed by platforms that extract value from users while concentrating wealth among owners), and political representation (enclosed by a system in which campaign financing ensures that elected officials serve donor interests—elite interests—regardless of popular preferences).

Each enclosure removes one more support from the lives of the non-elite. No single enclosure is lethal. Collectively, they constitute the progressive withdrawal of the conditions necessary for working-class existence. The population is not murdered. It is slowly rendered unable to sustain itself—just as the English peasantry was not slaughtered but simply denied access to the land.

VII. THE SPARTAN FUTURE: EGALITARIANISM AMONG THE SURVIVORS

The Paradox of Elite Egalitarianism

The endpoint of this trajectory is paradoxical only if one assumes that elites are inherently authoritarian. They are not. As demonstrated in Section III, elites have consistently maintained egalitarian, rights-based, cooperative relations *among themselves*. The authoritarianism of civilization has been directed downward, at the underclass, and outward, at other civilizations' populations. Among peers, elites are remarkably civilized.

This is not hypocrisy. It is rational behavior. Elites possess the resources, skills, and social capital to make egalitarian governance work. They share interests (protecting property, maintaining order, facilitating commerce). They possess roughly comparable power (no single elite member can dominate all others without coalition). They benefit from predictable rules (legal frameworks reduce transaction costs and prevent destructive intra-elite conflict). They have the education and leisure to participate in governance.

The conditions that make democracy functional—rough equality of resources, shared interests, capacity for informed participation, mechanisms for peaceful dispute resolution—have always existed among elite populations. Democracy has always worked at the top. It has struggled at the bottom because the conditions were absent: vast inequality of resources, divergent interests between extractors and extracted, limited capacity for participation among overworked laborers, and mechanisms of control masquerading as governance.

The Spartan Model

Sparta operationalized elite egalitarianism with unusual transparency. The Spartan citizen body—the *homoioi*, "the Equals"—practiced a form of communism that would have impressed Marx:

Equal land allotments (*kleroi*) distributed to each citizen, worked by Helot labor. Communal dining halls (*syssitia*) where all citizens ate the same food at the same tables. Prohibition of gold and silver currency, replacing it with unwieldy iron bars to discourage wealth accumulation. Collective child-rearing (*agoge*) in which all citizen boys were educated together regardless of family wealth. Decision-making through the assembly (*apella*) in which every citizen had a voice.

Among the Spartans themselves, inequality was minimal and conspicuous consumption was forbidden. Relations were governed by mutual respect, shared obligation, and genuine collective identity. The Spartan citizen experienced something approaching real freedom—freedom from want, freedom from domination by other citizens, freedom to participate in governance.

The foundation, of course, was the Helots. An enslaved population outnumbering the Spartans roughly seven to one performed all agricultural labor, domestic service, and manual work. Spartan egalitarianism was possible because Spartan citizens did not work. Their "freedom" was purchased with others' bondage.

Jefferson's Christian Sparta

Thomas Jefferson recognized the Spartan model in the American South and admired it. The plantation class—slaveholding gentlemen of roughly equal social standing—practiced a form of republican self-governance remarkably similar to the Spartan ideal. They debated as equals in legislative assemblies. They developed sophisticated legal frameworks governing their mutual relations. They cultivated arts, letters, and philosophical inquiry. They conceived of themselves as a virtuous republican aristocracy on the classical model.

Jefferson's phrase "Christian Sparta" captured both the similarity and the modification: Southern planter society replicated Spartan elite egalitarianism within a Christian moral framework that provided additional legitimating narrative (divine sanction for the social order, biblical justification for slavery, providential explanation for racial hierarchy).

The Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776), drafted by George Mason—a slaveholder—declared that "all men are by nature equally free and independent." The statement was not hypocritical in its original context. It meant what it said—about the men Mason recognized as his equals. It was an intra-elite declaration, a statement of principle governing relations among the planter class. The enslaved population supporting that class was simply outside the frame.

The Machine Helots

Now project the Spartan model forward. Replace the Helots with machines.

A society in which all productive labor—agriculture, manufacturing, construction, services—is performed by AI-directed robotic systems requires no underclass. The surplus that supports elite existence comes from machines that do not resist, do not require legitimating narratives, do not develop class consciousness, and do not demand concessions.

In such a society, the remaining population—the former elite—would have every incentive to maintain the egalitarian, rights-based governance they have always practiced among themselves. They would share interests (maintaining the technological systems that support their existence). They would possess roughly comparable power (no individual could dominate all others). They would benefit from predictable rules (legal frameworks facilitate cooperation). They would have the education and leisure to participate in governance.

The legal traditions developed over centuries—the Magna Carta, the constitutional frameworks, the declarations of rights—would function as originally intended: as agreements among equals governing their mutual relations. The difference is that "equals" would no longer mean "those who own enough property to matter." It would mean "everyone who remains."

The result would be something approaching genuine egalitarian democracy—not despite the elimination of the underclass but *because* of it. The structural conditions that prevented democracy from functioning (extreme inequality, divergent interests between classes,

exploitation requiring legitimation) would be resolved by the removal of the exploited class. What remains is a society of peers supported by machine labor.

VIII. THE TRAJECTORY: FROM EXPLOITATION TO OBSOLESCENCE

Phase One: Exploitation (3000 BCE - 1800 CE)

For five thousand years, the dominant mode of elite-underclass relations was exploitation. The elite needed the underclass and extracted from it by force, supplemented by belief infrastructure.

This period produced the architecture of domination documented across this series: containment, metabolic dependency, and legitimating narratives. The underclass was exploited but maintained—kept alive, kept working, kept fighting—because its labor and military service were essential.

The celebrated legal and political achievements of this period—the Roman Republic, the Magna Carta, the Renaissance city-states—were intra-elite arrangements governing how elites related to each other while collectively extracting from the mass of humanity below.

Phase Two: Managed Exploitation (1800 - 1970)

The Industrial Revolution and the age of mass politics modified the arrangement. The underclass remained necessary—factory workers, soldiers for total war, consumers for mass production—but became sufficiently organized to extract concessions. Labor unions, universal suffrage, social insurance, public education, and civil rights legislation expanded the protections originally designed for elites to cover broader populations.

This was not a change in the fundamental structure but in the terms of exploitation. The underclass remained subordinate and extracted from. But because it was needed, it could demand better terms. The welfare state, universal healthcare, and public infrastructure were concessions—prices paid for labor and military service that the elite could not yet do without.

Marx observed this period and predicted that the managed-exploitation arrangement was unstable—that workers would eventually demand not better terms but control. He was right about instability but wrong about the direction of resolution.

Phase Three: The Decoupling (1970 - Present)

Beginning in the 1970s—with the end of conscription, the rise of financialized capitalism, the beginning of the digital revolution, and the acceleration of automation—the three dependencies began to sever.

Labor's share of national income declined. Manufacturing employment collapsed. Wages stagnated for the bottom half while incomes soared for the top. The welfare state was progressively dismantled—not because the ideology changed but because the structural incentive to maintain it (keeping the necessary population functional) was eroding.

Military conscription ended. Wars were fought by small professional forces supplemented by private contractors, then increasingly by drones and autonomous systems. The citizen-soldier model that had given common people leverage over national security policy was abandoned.

The economy financialized. Elite wealth decoupled from mass consumption. Real estate, equities, and financial instruments generated returns through appreciation and trading, not through selling products to working-class consumers.

Each decoupling removed one structural rationale for maintaining working-class prosperity. The concessions of the managed-exploitation era—the social safety net, public investment, labor protections—were withdrawn not because elites became crueler but because the population those concessions sustained was becoming less necessary.

Phase Four: Obsolescence (Emerging)

The trajectory points toward a period in which the underclass transitions from exploited asset to structural liability.

When AI and robotics can perform all economically necessary labor, when autonomous weapons systems can conduct all necessary military operations, and when elite wealth no longer depends on mass consumer purchasing power, the underclass ceases to provide any input that justifies the cost of its maintenance.

The cost of maintaining billions of human beings—feeding them, housing them, providing healthcare, managing their social problems, policing their desperation—becomes pure expense with no corresponding revenue. In the language of corporate accounting, the underclass moves from the asset column to the liability column.

And as the English Enclosures, the Highland Clearances, and the destruction of the buffalo demonstrate, elites do not carry liabilities. They liquidate them.

Phase Five: Aristocratic Egalitarianism (Projected)

The endpoint is not dystopia. It is utopia—for the survivors.

A global population reduced to the former elite class, supported by machine labor, governed by the rights-based legal frameworks that elites have always maintained among themselves, would

constitute the most egalitarian society in human history. Not because elites chose egalitarianism as a moral principle, but because the structural conditions that produced hierarchy—the need to extract from a subordinate class—would no longer exist.

The Spartan paradox resolves. Egalitarianism among equals was always possible; it was the requirement to dominate a laboring class that produced authoritarianism, belief infrastructure, and the architecture of domination. Remove the underclass and you remove the need for the apparatus of control. The containment, the legitimating narratives, the information asymmetry—all were technologies for managing a necessary but restive population. When the population is no longer necessary, the technologies are no longer needed.

What remains is a society of peers. Educated, resourced, accustomed to self-governance, supported by unlimited machine productivity—practicing the civilized relations they have always practiced among themselves, now extended to encompass all surviving humanity.

IX. OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

Objection: Elites Will Turn On Each Other

Without a common underclass to exploit, won't elite factions simply turn their domination apparatus against each other?

This objection underestimates the stability of intra-elite cooperation when external threats are removed. Elite Darwinism operates within hierarchies—competition for positions of authority. But when the hierarchy flattens because the subordinate population disappears, the competitive dynamic changes. Elites competing among rough equals, governed by legal frameworks designed for precisely this purpose, have historically maintained stable cooperation for extended periods. The Roman Senate functioned for centuries. The English Parliament has operated continuously since the thirteenth century. The American constitutional system has survived nearly 250 years.

Intra-elite conflict occurs but is managed through institutional mechanisms—courts, legislatures, elections, negotiations—rather than through the apparatus of mass domination. The tools of underclass control (secret police, mass incarceration, propaganda) would be unnecessary and inappropriate in a society of equals.

Objection: Moral Conscience Will Prevent It

Won't moral revulsion at the elimination of billions prevent elites from allowing the underclass to disappear?

This objection overestimates the role of moral sentiment in structural outcomes. The English landlords who enclosed the commons were not moral monsters. Many were devout Christians

who attended church, loved their families, and believed in justice. They simply did not perceive the peasants they displaced as falling within their moral community in a way that overrode economic calculation. The Spartan citizens who maintained the Helot system were not sociopaths. They were ordinary people who had been socialized to accept a particular arrangement as natural.

More fundamentally, the elimination will not require anyone to *choose* extermination. It will proceed through structural mechanisms—declining birth rates, rising mortality, withdrawal of infrastructure, economic exclusion—that no individual needs to consciously direct. The opioid epidemic was not designed to kill working-class Americans. It emerged from structural conditions (pharmaceutical profit motives, economic despair, inadequate regulation) that produced mass death without anyone planning it. The coming redundancy will operate similarly: not as conspiracy but as the aggregate outcome of millions of decisions, each rational from the decision-maker's perspective, collectively producing the elimination of an unnecessary population.

Objection: The Underclass Will Resist

Won't the working class, recognizing its impending redundancy, organize to prevent its elimination?

This objection underestimates the completeness of the metabolic trap. As *The Architecture of Domination* established, populations that have lost the skills for autonomous subsistence and expanded beyond natural carrying capacity cannot effectively resist the systems they depend on. A general strike presupposes that workers have something to withhold that employers need. When employers no longer need human labor, the strike loses its power. A revolution presupposes that the revolutionary class can seize the means of production. When the means of production are AI systems and robotic factories, "seizing" them requires technical capacity the working class does not possess.

Moreover, the belief infrastructure documented across this series has performed its function too well. Populations socialized for generations to accept hierarchy as natural, to identify with their rulers, to view their own subordination as legitimate, do not easily develop the class consciousness Marx predicted. They are more likely to blame themselves for their economic marginalization than to recognize it as structural—and the narrative infrastructure of modern media reinforces this individualization of systemic outcomes.

X. CONCLUSION: THE FINAL CHAPTER

The Complete Arc

This series has traced a single arc across five thousand years:

The Conquest of Freedom documented how agricultural states systematically eliminated autonomous human lifeways, celebrating that elimination as heroic progress through narrative engineering perfected over millennia.

Belief as Infrastructure revealed how claims to privileged knowledge—information asymmetry—enabled small elites to maintain control over vast populations without proportional coercion, and how this mechanism appeared through convergent evolution across isolated civilizations facing identical structural problems.

The Architecture of Domination demonstrated that coercive states rest on three interlocking systems—containment, metabolic dependency, and belief infrastructure—that co-evolve and mutually reinforce, producing populations that cannot leave, cannot survive independently, and accept their subordination as natural. Pre-Columbian North America served as the negative case proving the framework.

Elite Darwinism explained why positions of authority are systematically captured by strategic operators regardless of institutional purpose—and why liberation movements reliably transform into new systems of control.

This final paper identifies the trajectory's endpoint. The underclass—the great mass of humanity maintained for five thousand years as a necessary input for elite projects—is becoming unnecessary. The three dependencies that gave common people structural leverage (labor, military service, consumption) are being severed by technological development. Historical precedent demonstrates that elites do not maintain unnecessary populations. And the legal, political, and social frameworks celebrated as universal human achievements were always intra-elite agreements that will function as intended when only elites remain.

Marx, Inverted

Karl Marx was the most penetrating analyst of domination since the authors of Deuteronomy. He correctly identified the mechanisms of exploitation, the function of ideology in maintaining class rule, and the structural contradictions of capitalism. His error was teleological: he assumed history had a moral arc bending toward justice, that the exploited class would inevitably triumph over the exploiting class.

The structural analysis developed in this series suggests a darker resolution. The state will not wither away. The proletariat will. Not because the ruling class chose cruelty over compassion, but because the structural logic of five thousand years of civilization points in only one direction: toward the optimization of the system, which means the elimination of the inefficient input.

The underclass was never the point. It was the tool. And tools, when they become obsolete, are discarded.

The World After

What comes after is not a nightmare. It is, for the survivors, something close to the dream every utopian theorist has imagined: a society of genuine equals, freed from labor by machine productivity, governed by rights-based frameworks honed over centuries of intra-elite cooperation, practicing the civilized relations that elites have always maintained among themselves.

Jefferson's Christian Sparta—without the Christianity, without the slavery, without the contradiction.

Just the Equals.

Supported by machines instead of Helots.

Governing themselves as they always have.

The only difference is that this time, there is no one underneath.

Not because the underclass was liberated.

Because it is gone.

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